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ABSTRACT

Why so many Latino students drop out of schools is considered from the perspective that much of the literature on this problem is inadequate because it ignores the experiences of Latino youth at home, in school, and in the community, and attempts to explain the failure of the educational system in terms of just one area. Interviews were conducted with 10 focus groups in southwest Detroit (Michigan). Three groups were for junior high school students and two were for parents, with one each for teachers, community workers, and school counselors, and two for Latino dropouts. In addition, a program that brings together college students as tutors, mentors, and group leaders with junior high school students was examined. Both the focus groups and the successes of the "Youth Helping Youth" program demonstrate that violence is endemic in the contexts in which these urban Latino students live and that traditional approaches have failed to recognize or to address the needs of these students. Integrating emotional support and individualized attention offers promise for combatting the environment that assaults these students. (Contains 71 references.) (SLD)

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Youth Helping Youth: Linking Violence to Poor School Performance In the Latino Community

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April 1994

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"I went to school to see the counselor about my daughter, and she said, 'Parents just send their children here to be babysat. Your kid will leave school at 16.' Every time I go to the school they tell you the same thing. I do not want my kid to be baby sat. I need her at home. I send her here to get an education but the schools don't care about our children." Mother in Southwest Detroit.

This paper is an effort to discuss and understand the reasons why so many Latino students in the United States leave school before high school graduation. It is also an attempt to suggest new ways of thinking about school "drop-out," and a forum to suggest innovative strategies for reducing this epidemic. We believe that much of the literature about poor school performance and school drop out among Latino youth is inadequate because it divides the experiences of Latino youth at home, in school and in their communities, and attempts to explains the failure of the educational system in terms of just one of these sites. Instead, by bringing together these experiences into a larger picture, we believe that new insights and understanding about education and Latino youth can be observed. We will discuss a program that we initiated in our efforts to address the problems that we discovered. We believe that the implications of our research, and the success of our pilot program apply to Latino students and recommend new ways of looking at other populations of students at "high risk." Usually scholars and educators focus their studies and thus their action projects on schools or communities, without bringing these environments together. We believe that students do not understand their experiences in these fragmented ways, but instead conceptualize their lives as ones which integrate the school and community experiences. By bringing these together, we hope to better understand the circumstances which push Latino children out of the public school system.

About one in twelve Americans is Hispanic and one in ten public school students is Hispanic. While the Hispanic population in the United States is growing five times as fast as the non-Hispanic population, more than two in five Hispanics drop out of school before they earn their high school diplomas. According to a recent report presented by the

Children Youth and families select committee to the U.S. House of Representatives (1990), "the number of Hispanic children is growing faster than any other population group in the U.S. From 1985 to 2000 there will be: 2.4 million more Hispanic children; living in the United States." This number surpasses the projected increase in the population of children of any other racial or ethnic group in the country. Yet, the educational gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanics continues to widen.

The 1980s witnessed an extraordinary increase in neighborhood violence in major cities across the United States. Detroit has been no exception to this trend. In fact, the crime rate in the city has skyrocketed in the last 13 years. The origins of this violence are deeply rooted in the declining economic stability of city industry, the nation-wide drug epidemic, and the relatively recent acceptability of guns as a means of solving both domestic and crime related conflicts. Although high inner-city murder rates have tended to receive nation-wide attention and concern, these figures represent only a crude index of the day-to-day community violence that characterizes urban neighborhoods such as Detroit.

Southwest Detroit is multi-racial, multi-cultural community. Latinos, including Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other South Americans, African-Americans, Arab-Americans, and whites all live in the community. The majority of Latinos living in Detroit live in this neighborhood. Many factories and businesses connected to automobile production were located in the neighborhood before 1986 when most of the local auto factories closed, disrupting the economic base for the neighborhood. Thus, the Latino community in Southwest Detroit was economically devastated.

Prior to the plant closings, Southwest Detroit boasted the largest percentage of owner-occupied homes in the city. Now rental homes are the norm in the community, and many areas are peppered with abandoned homes from foreclosures and economic decline. As a result of this dramatic economic instability, young people living in the neighborhood

live with a sense of despair. Young people watch their parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and other significant adults search for employment without success. They share the humiliation that is thrust on their parents because of the way that economic need is understood in the culture of capitalism which creates American mores and dreams. Few see opportunities for their future employment as adults.

One avenue historically seen as a means of escaping the bleak economic situation is education. Unfortunately, school presents another dismal picture for young people. The drop-out rate for the city of Detroit is 50%. However, for the Southwest Detroit community, it is estimated by community organizations, such as Latino Family Services, and groups of parents interviewed for this study, that the drop-out, or more appropriately "push-out", rate is approaching 86%. Many of the youth in this community are not making it out of middle school. The Detroit Public School System has failed to meet the needs of Latino/a youth. Southwest Detroit has 15 schools that have a high concentration of Latino students. According to the school system there are a total of 1,500 Latino students, but this number seems low by estimates of others. But, few specific services are available to this significant minority of students. There are few Latino teachers, and even less administrators in the 11 predominantly Latino schools. While the ability of these schools to prepare youth for the technological demands of today's society is very limited, with such high drop-out rates, this kind of preparation is impossible. Instead of a site for learning and education, schools are viewed with dissatisfaction and derision by young people. Students see no reason to continue on with their education, since it does not seem to be taking them anywhere and it is not providing a relevant supports for their life situations. The schools are not addressing their every-day reality. They continue to ignore their bi-culturalism, the violence which the children experience, their poverty, and the lack of opportunities that the community can offer. As a result, many drop out of school before they finish their high school diplomas.

Literature Review and Assessment of the Problem to be Addressed

This research is an effort to bridge the gap between studies which focus on Latino school performance and those which investigate community mental health. It was born out of my experiences working with Latino children whose mothers are incarcerated. Working with this population, I became aware of the relationship between trauma and school performance. These children often had difficulties at school. Children who had previously been good or adequate students became behavior problems, and suffered from difficulties learning. I discovered that these problems were not only related to the absence of their mothers, but were also, and significantly, a result of the trauma that they had experienced during their mothers arrests. Many of these children witnessed their mother's arrests, or other forms of violence perpetuated against their mothers, and some were victims of the same violence. These problems were seldom addressed by teachers or caregivers, and instead, these children fell through the cracks of the educational system. Educational problems were the most commonly shared difficulty among this population. this was clearly a result of the traumas that they experience because for many it was a significant shift from their educational performance before their mothers' arrests.

Many researchers have investigated the phenomena of Latino dropout. Arias, Fligstein and Fernandez discuss boredom as the most common reason that Latino young people leave school prior to graduation (Arias, 1986; Fligstein and Fernandez, 1989). Most literature about school drop out argues that students drop out of school because it is difficult for them. Researchers have found that students who do not do well in elementary school are at a much higher risk for leaving school at some point before graduation (Fraser, 1989). Others have found that children who repeat a grade are at high risk (Barro and Kostad, 1987; Fine 1991; Grissom and Shepard, 1989). Others have found that teen age pregnancy also impairs students' ability to finish school (Hayes, 1987; Abrahams, 1988; Fernandez 1989; Rumberger, 1983; and Donelly, 1990). Suspensions serve to push students out of school. Disciplinary actions in the form of suspension recommend to

children that it is in fact better to stay away from school (Fine, 1987, 1991; Silinker and Martin, 1992). While all of these problems need to be addressed by educational institutions which serve Latino children, they are not the only causes of drop out.

Although many scholars have discussed the ways in which urban violence has *impaired* the capacity of children to learn, or process information, they have not offered a more integrated understanding of how experiences outside of school actually contribute to the very constitution of classroom environments. Scholars talk about violence, and they talk about schools, but the classroom remains idealized as a "temple of learning." This sanitized space is not affected by students' experiences. Much of this scholarship makes the same sorts of assumptions that educational bureaucracies do: once a student comes into school, he or she should leave his or her "personal" problems at the door. Thus, when students cannot neatly separate their lives into distinct spheres, they are blamed for impairing their own learning processes by complicating their school experiences with trauma from the outside. This separation between real life and the learning environments provided in schools is a false one. Teachers and school systems continue to administer their services to their conception of an idealized student, who does not live in a world where violence occurs. But, this violence is indeed an important part of the lives of many students. Children who live in cities witness a large amount of violence, and are often victims of violence. In my work with Latino youth in Southwest Detroit, I have observed clear evidence violence. Children have talked about their own experiences of the abuse violence that they have witnessed. Many carry the marks of violence on their bruised bodies.

A growing body of research shows that witnessing and experiencing traumatic events can seriously impair healthy socio-emotional development. An important element of this literature which we would like to stress in this paper is that children can suffer from the effects of violence when they witness that violence. Witnessing violence is in fact itself a traumatic experience. Violence can cause profound changes in a child's sense of safety

and security in future intimate human relationships. As a result of the trauma that they experience, children often suffer from behavior problems, and frequently "act out" their anger. These children are then marked as "uncontrollable" by teachers and school administrators, and subsequently dismissed as trouble-makers, learning disabled or spacey. But, their disruptive behavior is a symptom of the traumatic experience. Some children have witnessed They are often suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). This syndrome is a common reaction to violence among individuals who have been the victims of violence or those who have witnessed severe violence. Laurel et. al. discuss five general traumatic experiences which often result in the presence of PTSD in children. These "five basic threats" include "(1) threats against the child's life, (2) fears about physical harm, (3) concern over the safety of attachment figures, (4) threats to self-image, and (5) a sense of isolation surrounding these threats and fears" (Laurel, et. al., 1988). All five of these threats is an attack on a child's sense of safety. But, these are traumatic because they do not only undermine a child's sense of safety at the moment, but severely undermine the possibility of feeling safe in the future. The child therefore feels a constant threat to his or her well being, and develops coping mechanisms to deal with this threat which can severely interfere with a child's learning. Instead of working through their fears, and putting the experience behind them, the trauma itself becomes central to a child's experience. Children employ many different psychological methods to cope with these traumatic threats to their safety. In our research, we found fixation on the trauma and preoccupation with future harm to be the most common reactions to traumatic experiences. The first is the ritualistic recounting of the experience in an unemotional way. This fixation to the trauma is an effort to turn the event into something manageable by turning it into a everyday story rather than the dramatic and traumatic experience that it was. Youth try to "laugh it off" by minimizing their emotions and maximizing the interest of the narrative with details. We found this mechanism predominant among gang members and other children who seemed to want us to believe that they reveled in

violence. One 15 year old male gang member, who was clearly trying to impress us, said "I love to kill, it makes me feel superior. I decide who dies and who lives." Clearly this young man was trying to control frightening experiences by "playing God," and denying and emotional engagement with death.

The second common response to violence that we observed was a preoccupation with future harm. Children become fixated on the possibility of harm that will happen to them and their families. One boy said, "I have a pocket knife under my mattress and big steel bat." He does not feel safe in his bed. These feelings are often encouraged by parents, as one child reported, "my father keeps a gun under his bed, and my mother gives each of us a pocket knife to carry around while we are at home." School administrators also frustrate the specter of violence which looms over the community. Children are not allowed to carry bags to and from school. If they want to transport anything, including their books, they must carry it without a bag. They attribute everything to gang violence. This heightened sense of fear is also encouraged by the specters of break-ins and drive-by shootings, muggings and personal attacks is omni-present. Viewing violent events can cause profound changes in the child's sense of safety. This clearly has severe repercussions on many aspects of children's lives. In other words, the combinations of the trauma that these children experiences along with their sense inescapable. These traumatic experiences can result in reactions which are debilitating to the children themselves. Not all of the children not have the coping mechanisms to handle this. Because everyone talks about violence so much, people feel like they do not have any ways to avoid it. The child feels unprotected and Its symptoms are flashbacks, nightmares, depression, denial, isolation, survivor guilt, rage, and insomnia. PTSD literally draws a survivor of violence into hand to hand combat with him or herself. His or her reality becomes attenuated from the present, and is often considered crazy. Children are seldom diagnosed with PTSD, and their mis-behavior remains a mystery to their caregivers and teachers. Because of this misunderstanding, children are deprived of needed educations. cognition gets impaired.

Recent population surveys have drawn attention to the previously unappreciated extent of domestic violence in our society. Spouse beating and child abuse account for a large number of direct victims, and an even greater number of child witnesses (Pfouts et. al., 1982). Child witnesses of violence cannot separate themselves from the pain of the victim, especially if they know or love that person. An Epidemiological survey of marital aggression within a large sample of the general population (Kahmus, 1984) indicates that child witnessing of domestic violence is in fact one of the most significant predictors for inter-generational transmission of spouse beating. This shows the significance of the impact of witnessing violence on children. Given the high incidence of children present during the sexual assault of their mothers, the literature on rape and rape treatment is surprisingly silent on the subject.

One study which investigates the affects of PTSD on women who experienced incest as children concluded that these women regard their incest experience as the most damaging event of their lives. They suffered from such symptoms as intrusive imagery of the incest, feelings of detachment from their peers and families, constricted affective lives and sleep disturbances (Frederick H. Lindberg and Lois J. Distad, 1985). This suggests that children who witness abuse also suffer from these symptoms considering the similarity of childrens' responses to their own abuse experiences and those perpetuated against their mothers. Research on rape suggests that several factors may influence the impact of trauma and abuse on a child including the age of the child, the nature of the relationship between the child and the perpetrators, the gender of the child and the perpetrator, and the use of force and/or violence. This suggests that different traumatic experiences provide for different symptomatic responses (Price and Veldiseri, 1981; Schultz and Jones, 1983).

Most studies which have discussed violence and trauma fail to address the educational difficulties that children face as a result of trauma. Violence has an impact on education. It is important, therefore, to explore the ways in which children have responded to the upsurge in urban violence. Children who suffer from PTSD have

difficulties learning because the symptoms of their trauma are not recognized or addressed by teachers and administrators. There has not been any linkage between the violent experiences that children experience and witness at home and in the community and their relationship to learning and school. As early as 1971, Gardner reported that the experiences of violence can chronically impair learning, but few scholars or educators picked up on his lead. In this paper, we are attempting to show how important violence is to childrens' lives, and to their educational experiences. One child who participated in our program expressed the confusion that he experiences in school due to the violence of his home very clearly. He said that "I listen, but what happens in my house is in my mind all the time, and I get lost with what she's saying." His problem was not handled in school. We believe, conversely, that his problem, and the experiences of others can be adequately addressed in a school environment. Children already suffer from the violence that they experience and witness. Their educations do not also need to suffer. We attempted to set up a program which would address the academic problems of children who were victims of violence, or witnessed violence. The following is an explanation of our program, and a discussion of its implications for the educations of urban youth.

Methodology

This project began as an effort to bridge the gulf between childrens' experiences of violence and their educational problems. Latino Family Services contacted me because members were concerned about the failure of the public education system for Latino youth. They requested that I assess the problems in the neighborhood, and devise an program for intervention. I assessed the educational experiences of Latino youth as well as their experiences at home and in their neighborhoods. I turned the project out to the community because it was clear that one of the major failures of public education was its isolation from the other experiences of youth.

We conducted interviews with ten focus groups. Three of these focus groups were made up of Latino junior high school students who were at "high risk" for dropping out of school, meaning that they were either behavior problems or had poor grades. Two were made up of parents. One was with teachers, one had community workers. One was with school counselors, and two were with Latino youth who had already dropped out of school. We assessed the level and type of violence in the Latino community. The reason that we focused, and continue to focus, on junior high school students is because this is usually when children drop out of school if they drop out.

These symptoms impair a child's ability to learn. Many children suffered from difficulties concentrating, while others re-enact the violence that has been part of their lives. These children often engage other children or teachers in physical and violent conflict. Children who suffer from these problems are often diagnosed as learning disabled, or with attention deficiency disorder, or as trouble makers. The problem with these diagnoses, is that instead of helping a child to overcome these problems, educators often use diagnoses to dismiss the concerns of children. They lower their expectations of these children, and assume that their symptoms are not solvable, but instead permanent impediments to learning. By so doing, educators and caretakers often encourage the symptoms that children with PTSD experience. We approached teachers and encouraged them to send the children that they felt suffered from academic and behavior problems to our program. We also recruited children who were at "high risk" for dropping out because they had a lot of absences in school due to suspensions.

Both the academic and psychological evaluation of the children who participate in this program has been ongoing. Every six months, tests are re-administered to students in order to evaluate their progress in the program and re-assess their needs. To assess the academic achievement of students, we used the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), teachers evaluations, and report cards. For psychological evaluation, including the identification of PTSD, we conducted a series of clinical interviews with children, using a

number of traditional tests. Although we did not rely on these tests for concrete information, we used them as guidelines for identification of psychological problems. We were always conscious of the limits of these tests, for they did not address problems specifically relevant to Latino students, especially those who are bilingual. The tests included the following: The Harter Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance (Hater and Pike 1983), Children's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Inventory (Saigh, 1989) Children's Depression Inventory. These tests were used as a framework for investigating the prevalence of PTSD among these children. One of the criteria was that the children had to have four or more PTSD symptoms as defined by the DSMD-III.

Through the community assessment, we found that three forms of violence were important to community members. People in the community tend to complain about gang violence more than any other kind of violence. Gang violence is perceived as a public form of violence which is directed against the community. The police, school administrators, teachers and other public officials only see gang violence, and attempt to "do something" about the organization of gangs. These people do not understand that their attempts to control gangs are in fact impositions on many children who are not members of gangs. One girl explained her frustration with the restrictions imposed by school administrators and police. "I am tired of not wearing my favorite colors because you can't wear anything that you want. You have to set aside all of these clothes that you used to wear because they are gang colors." Another student complained that "the gang problem is bad because you can not do anything anymore without the police and teachers thinking you're doing something because you're in a gang. If you wear red and white they [the police] think you are a 'Count' [a gang]. If you wear green or black, they think you are a 'Cobra' [another gang]." Because of these fears, childrens' freedom is severely restricted.

Street violence was not the only form of violence affecting these children. In fact, domestic violence was extremely prevalent, and generated many fears and anxieties. Often

domestic violence is understood as a personal or private form of violence that does not affect a community, but only affects individuals. We found that this was not at all the case. Domestic violence, although it is less obvious to an outside observer, had a larger overall impact on internal community relations, and the levels of fear that youths and adults experienced. While gang violence threatened community members on the streets, domestic violence threatened their safety in the supposedly safe home environments of community members, especially women and children.

"My problem is really my parents. They fight too much. I get scared when my dad comes home drunk. That's when they fight. My mom doesn't really tell me that I have to study. She worries too much about my dad drinking." Clearly, this 13 year old girl was isolated by the domestic violence in her family. She did not get the support that she felt she needed, and instead was afraid of her father. Another 14 year old girl said, "When my dad comes home drunk he hits me and my brother for any little thing. And then my brother goes out and starts picking out fights with everybody." This young woman connected the violence that she experienced at home with the violence on the streets. She did not express her own violent fury, but instead articulated it through the actions of her brother.

"The school should have a counselor that you can talk to about the problems at home. My big problem is my parents. They fight too much. They don't get along well. My father hits my mother and my brother hits me. My mom gets angry with my brother for hitting me, but they give us a bad example, they are fighting all the time." This young girl both witnessed violence at home and she was the victim of continuing violence at the hands of her brother. She felt powerless and did not believe that there was anyone to talk to at school. She felt that school was failing her because it did not intervene in her life in meaningful ways. Students often talked about how they wanted counselors to listen to their problems, but were consistently disappointed. One 14 years old said, " I think they should have counselors in the school, but not like the once we have now they do not have

time to talk to us, counselor that will help you with the problems at home. They should have a counselor that is like a friend my parents fight too much and sometimes when I came to school I cannot concentrate."

Domestic violence was a common complaint among women. Many women explained that while people talk about violence as if it is outside, really much of the violence is in the home. "At home, our main problem is my husband's temper, and when he goes out with his friends and drinks, he comes home and gets angry with me and the children. And because he has a bad temper, he starts hitting me. And my son, who is 14, always tries to defend me, even if I ask him not to do that. That makes his father more angry. He called the police twice on him, but they didn't do anything." Another mother expressed similar concerns. "The violence is on the streets and inside the home. In our home, my husband doesn't live there but he comes from time to time, and when he comes he gets jealous and stuff and hits me and the children. He thinks the children are not telling him what I do, and he wants to make sure I don't get another man." Many women complained that drinking aggravated domestic violence situations, and some even said that economic frustrations mixed with alcohol had initiated the problems. "When we were in Mexico he used to be good, but when we came here, he's worried about not having a job, and he drinks too much, and he started to hit me when we came here."

We do not intend to recreate stereotypes which cast Latino men or Latino communities as unusually violent. By breaking the silence of domestic violence in Latino communities without breaking the same barriers in other communities, we are concerned that our research suggests that these problems are endemic to Latino communities because they are Latino. Quite the contrary is in fact true. Domestic violence is an enormous problem across racial, ethnic and economic lines, as is the shroud which covers it in silence. We do not intend to suggest that there is a profound cultural problem in Latino communities which creates an environment for large scale drop outs. Instead, we would like to suggest that the failure of educational, psychological and social work institutions in

catering to the needs of Latinos and their culture as well as the impact of trauma on these children has left Latino communities in crisis. Latino culture itself places a high value on education. Many of the parents who we talked to wanted their children to "be somebody," to make it out of the situations that they lived in. They dreamt that their children would be "better," and would be able to successfully exploit the resources which were available to them. A disproportionate amount of immigrant parents expressed these dreams. Clearly, these parents had not been disillusioned by their own experiences with American education like their second and third generation peers. They still believed that there were resources available to be exploited. All of these parents, however, regardless of their past experiences, hoped that their children could receive educations which would help them to escape their own economic hardships.

Thus, instead of blaming the parents, Latino culture, or youth themselves for the high drop out rates in Latino communities, I believe that the exclusion that Latino youth experience with relationship to educational institutions, and the bad experiences that they have in schools literally "push" them out (Finn, 1992). Part of the reason that Latino students feel as if they are being pushed out of school is that they feel like they need to choose between their communities and their educations. Education is offered as a way to escape not just the economic hardships of the "barrio," but Latino culture in general. If these are the choices that educators are offering our young people, how could we expect any of them to succeed. The fact that many children do in fact make it through an educational system which considers them detrimental to its very agenda is an astounding accomplishment, and must be a difficult and painful negotiation on the part of these children.

In other words, today's educational system does not merely disregard the ethnicity of Latino students. Instead it rejects this ethnicity and their cultural experiences as not merely irrelevant to their educations but detrimental to their development as "Americans." Ethnicity can not be understood as something which stands in the way of education.

Instead it is something that will not change and that we don't want to change. Latino culture is not a detriment to Latino youth. It is one of the wonderful things that they have and in fact must understood as a site which can be exploited as a resource. In other words, if educators were devoted to teaching Latino children that their needs were important and that their culture was exciting, they would not have to choose between their communities and their educations. Instead, they would be able to receive educations which were relevant to their community experiences.

The Intervention Component: Youth Helping Youth

For the past year, I have conducted a program through Eastern Michigan University which brings together the learning experiences of college students and junior high school students. The program utilizes post-secondary students as volunteer tutors, mentors, and group leaders in a predominantly Latino middle school in Southwest Detroit. Students from Eastern Michigan University became involved in the Southwest Detroit community to impact positively on the lives of young people. Two days a week, a group of 15 students from the university come to Earhart Middle School for a three hour tutoring session. They spend the morning with thirty students at Earhart Middle School talking and tutoring them. For the first hour and a half, the EMU students have one-on-two meeting with the youth. For the second part of the session, they help facilitate an informal support group designed to address the common emotional needs of the Earhart students. This tutoring program brings together teaching and learning experiences for college and middle school students as it offers a unique pedagogical environment which brings together the academic and emotional needs of children, addressing the ensemble of a child's needs.

The intent of the program is two-fold. First, through tutoring it addresses the academic needs of students. Second, through support groups and focused individual attention, it addresses the emotional needs of students. The reason that we integrate academic and emotional support into the same program is because we believe that they are

insufficient independently. The sustained individual attention that these students receive in their tutoring session is unusual in their school day; it gives students a profound sense of importance. Historically, most of these students have been marked as underachievers and have not considered themselves worthy of this kind of attention. They have not had the help that they needed to excel in a school environment Thus, while this one hour of tutoring helps children with their school work, it necessarily provides new self-confidence to students who do not believe in their own potential. Thus, academic help is offered in a supportive emotional environment.

For the last thirty minutes of the program, I facilitate a support group for the children. I initiated supportive conversations about the issues that were affecting them. We discussed domestic violence and gang violence frequently. We also focused on bi-culturalism, a topic which interested them very much, and strategies to enhance self-esteem through understanding pride in their ethnicity and cultural experiences. involving all of the students and college volunteers. The youth and volunteers discuss their families and their lives freely and openly. They are encouraged to express their feelings and supported by a large group of adults who are prepared to listen and respect them.

The kind of attention to students' thoughts and insights provided by the support session, is rare in a traditional academic environment. Teachers are trained to look at students in terms of their academic achievement without reference to their lives. Thus, they do not know how to support children's needs which are not clearly academic. Instead, they look at children academically. These teachers do not have the time or the resources to offer students supportive attention. Instead, schools and teachers need to control their students. The reinforcement of behavioral norms becomes more important than the encouragement of young people's ideas in these classroom settings. Furthermore, students' lives and experiences are deemed irrelevant to the continuation of academic learning. Instead of incorporating a multitude of ideas, traditional educational norms

dictate that the educational process must be streamlined. Thus students' individual voices are lost in large classroom settings.

Tutors read a number of essays about bilingual education and discussed the merits and problems of various different pedagogical approaches to teaching bilingual children. They also read novels and books written by Latino authors describing their experiences growing up in the United States. Many students with little previous contact with Latino communities, initially believed that English-only education would be the most beneficial approach to teaching bilingual children. However, they came to understand that without an education which taught a child how to master her or his first language, that child would never be able to master a second language. The students learned about Latino culture through the tutoring program as well as walks through the barrio, eating Mexican food, and visiting the homes of the children, experiencing the warmth of their parents, they smelled the smells of the bakery. Cultural familiarity is learned through all of the five senses, and these college students experienced a partial submersion which educated them in ways which are unavailable on a university campus. After each session, the tutors and myself discussed their experiences. As one college student said, "As has been mentioned in class, we tutors can often feel estranged from the world in which the kids live. The closer we feel to the kids, the better we are going to relate and communicate with them and the tighter this bond, the more we are going to be able to help them."

Because the participants in this program receive academic credit for their work, the time that they devote to community service is also time devoted to their studies. Thus, for these students, their college campus is metaphorically extended into the Latino urban community of Detroit. Their academic environment becomes larger and more diverse. Instead of interacting only with their professors and their peers, students from Eastern Michigan University are offered the opportunity to extend the parameters of their educational experience. Most of the college students are white and come from rural or

suburban backgrounds. For many, this is their first opportunity to interact with urban communities of color.

This program has been an extremely rewarding experience both Eastern Michigan University students and Latino youth in South West Detroit. According to the pre- and post-tests that we conducted, every student who participated in our program gained between three and five grade levels of competency in their English and mathematics skills. The teachers at Earhart and the parents commended our accomplishments, and expressed gratitude at our commitment. One of the parents exclaimed, "This is the best program that the school has had." One of the most endearing proofs of our accomplishments is the eagerness with which the children greet us when we come. More than once, children have scolded us for arriving only five minutes late, and said that they would have been disappointed if we did not make it. Attendance at our program has been consistently excellent. Although the Earhart students are earmarked as future drop-outs, few miss our classes. The college students who participate are also surprisingly devoted, evincing their commitment to a good program. They rarely miss, even though we leave town at 7:30 a.m. The childrens' improvement in academic performance has also been enormously rewarding. Four young people whose prospects of passing sixth grade were slim, are moving on into seventh grade next year because of their participation in this program. One young person explained that he learned from the project that he has "to work hard to do what I want." As children improve in understanding the consequences of violence in their lives, and feel supported in their endeavors to overcome the symptoms of PTSD, their school performance has undergone a dramatic change for the better.

Another important component of this program is a support group run for parents. These groups met every other week. All of the mothers whose children were in our program were invited to participate, and one of them was paid to organize the group. This group met at Latino Family Services, and its main focus was to discuss with the parents what we talked with the children about. By doing this, the mothers could both

give us feed-back, learn from the materials that we presented, and learn about the educational experiences of their children. The mothers wanted to discuss domestic violence and teenage sexuality most frequently, as well as bi-culturalism, understanding American culture as they kept Latino identity. We also helped mothers deal with school administrators, and gain better access to their childrens' educations. One parents said, "I love to come to the group, I feel that since I've been coming to the group I understand my child more."

Implications for educators

Educators are not seriously considering how violence affects the lives of their students. Instead, they are attempting to create safe fortresses which do not "permit" violence by controlling children. Educators need to understand that violence is not something that can be locked out of school because it cannot be locked out of the consciousnesses of the students who attend schools. Violence is a phenomenon which comes from both the outside and the inside. It is experienced in homes and in streets, and their relationship to each other cannot be ignored. One of the important implications for education that this study suggests is that instead of contributing to the hysteria surrounding urban violence, educators and administrators must take the consequences of violence seriously and attempt to counter the popular equation of urban experiences and violence. Educators are suspending children all of the time in their efforts to keep the "bad elements" outside of the sanctuary of the school. But this perpetuates the frustrations of students who are being pushed out of public education, and those who stay in school with their violent experiences which cannot be addressed.

In this study, we found that teachers are not adequately educated to address violence in relevant ways to students. Often teachers are afraid of their students, and in response attempt to impose stricter controls in the classroom. Their fear cultivates inflexibility and rejection of any experiences of the children that they teach. We found that

these teachers were largely isolated from the Latino community whose children they were attempting to teach. We believe that teachers need to be educated in culturally competent ways, and learn about the communities which they serve instead of just the children in the school environment. Children are further traumatized by teaching methods which ignore their experiences. A class which brings together the psychological and educational experiences of children like the "youth helping youth" program benefits Latino youth because it specifically addresses their needs, and offers them a forum through which they can express their anxieties.

Ultimately, I feel the most important outcome of this project is that it can provide an educational alternative for Latino children in poor urban settings, where violence is endemic. Latino students have become disenfranchised from the educational system in the United States. A successful intervention is urgent. Clearly, traditional methods have not been working to address the needs of Latino youth; an alternative is imperative to the future life of the community. Although school interventions are aimed at different minority groups, the specific needs of Latinos are often underrepresented, if represented at all. This project begin to define, research, and evaluate an alternative to traditional modes of education, for Latinos and, by extension, for other disenfranchised groups whose neighborhoods are plagued with violence.

Traditional educational initiatives have clearly failed Latino students that live in situations of violence, thereby contributing to the continuation of poverty among this ethnic group. New programs such as this one which integrate emotional support and individualized attention for students, respect the multi-faceted needs of the students that they serve. Children's needs cannot be met in a school environment which caters only to their intellect. Other resources need to be available to students as participants in their communities. As extra-curricular programs are cut away from tightening school budgets, young people become more and more alienated from an institution which attempts only to teach them reading, writing and arithmetic in isolation from their other needs.

Although this program is not comprehensive in its scope, and does not portend to solve all of the many problems that children face in our urban schools, it does suggest new possibilities for educational intervention. An expansion of the definition of traditional education to include emotional support has proven enormously beneficial to the students with whom I have worked. Because students do not live in isolation form their communities, their neighborhoods and their families, and because the violence in urban communities has a profound impact on the lives of young people, this kind of support is essential to fostering young minds and keeping young bodies in school.

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